

Andrea Busby
Education Committee Hearing
RE: SB 948
Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Busby, and I am the Principal of Odyssey Community School in Manchester. I am here today to speak in support of SB 948. For over 20 years, charter schools in Connecticut have been serving students in remarkable ways, and doing so with inequitable funding in comparison to traditional public schools. Our students thrive in the environments that we provide and they should not be penalized with limited opportunities and resources for choosing a school that best meets their needs. I urge you to consider a means to provide equitable funding for all of our students which is focused on need, rather than the type of public school they attend or the zip code where they live.

Since Odyssey was established, we have been completely committed to supporting the achievement of every student in our diverse learning community, and closing the gaps for our low-income and minority students. Our rigorous academic expectations and focus on character development have resulted in high levels of achievement for our students. Our high needs students have demonstrated exceptional growth in recent years, and we continue to see improvement by providing high levels of support to meet all student needs. We are continuing to improve our program to support our rapidly growing population of English learners, and our efforts in growing this program were recognized as a charter school best practice in 2020. Additional funding would help us to hire additional staff, provide professional development to teachers, purchase resources that will help us to continue to improve instruction for our English learners, and provide necessary interventions to support the growth of all of our students.

We have a wonderful community of families who are thrilled with the learning environment that Odyssey provides, but making the choice to send their children to Odyssey means sacrificing multiple opportunities that they would receive in a traditional public school. For example, our limited building space does not allow us to have a kitchen, and food must be heated off site and brought in daily. Our students do not have the opportunity to participate in a World Language Program, requiring them to take beginning courses when they enter high school, and placing them behind their peers. Our students do not have the opportunity to play instruments or participate in band or chorus. Additional funding would allow us to provide these opportunities and others for our students.

Our students deserve to have the means to receive equitable opportunities to their peers in traditional public schools, and I hope that you will consider this critical need. Thank you very much for your time.